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51



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51 CONTENTS

SUPER SCARY STORY
Bloodlines

OUR HAUNTED WORLD
Czech Republic and Slovakia
Cut-glass Clot!

STRANGE BUT TRUE
Dreamtime

CLASSIC SERIAL
A Christmas Carol
Chapter 3

THE UNEXPLAINED
Little Folk

PUZZLES
Grisly Gods



Next week in

THE SPINECHILLER
Collection

SUPER SCARY STORY
A Time to Reap

OUR HAUNTED WORLD
Ireland
Fate's Fickle Fingers

STRANGE BUT TRUE
Anastasia

CLASSIC SERIAL
Dracula
Chapter 1

THE UNEXPLAINED
Plant Power

PUZZLES
Into the Future

BLOODLINES



y English teacher, Mrs Strathmore, made everyone
write an essay about our parents – where they were
born, what they're like, what they do for a living, and
all that kind of stuff. For the last three days the whole
class has had to sit here and listen to each kid read
his or her stupid essay out loud, and I've really felt like my brain
was going turn into mushroom soup.

At last Mrs Strathmore says, "Well, Mr Travis, it looks like
you're our last reader, doesn't it?"

Suddenly I'm a little nervous. I know I wrote a good essay, and
I'm pretty sure the class is going to like it, but I'm beginning to
think I should have stuck to the facts.

I give everybody a huge grin and clear my throat loudly. "My
Mum Married a Lazy, No-Good Vampire, by Raymond Travis."

Everybody laughs.

"My, that's an... interesting title, Raymond," says Mrs
Strathmore sarcastically. "Please continue."

"My mum is pretty cool, but I'm not
crazy about my dad. I'm adopted, and it
must have been my mum's idea to have
me, because my dad ignores me.



"My mum has blue eyes and short brown hair and is attractive, like me. Everyone says we look alike, even though I don't have a clue who my real mother is."

"Dad looks creepy. He's got jet-black hair and coal-black eyes. He sits around all day with the blinds drawn while Mum is out working hard, and he goes out all night."

"Mum's also a great cook. She makes two different dinners every night, because we like our meat cooked normally, but Dad likes his so rare it's dripping with..."

"That's enough, Raymond!" Mrs



Strathmore says, banging her fist on her desk. "Your task was to write a factual essay!"

"But this is factual," I tell her, "I can't help it if I've got a weird family!"

Mrs Strathmore looks at the class. For the first time in three days, everyone is actually listening. "OK, I give in," she grumbles.

I smile at the class, find the place where I left off, and continue. "My mum reads a lot. She's very intelligent – not unlike myself – so it's hard to figure out why she married a guy like my dad. I don't think I've ever seen him pick up a book. In fact, when he isn't sleeping, all I ever see him doing is watching old Dracula movies over and over again."

I pause for a moment to see if my classmates are into the essay as much as I am. A few of them are talking in the back, but I figure this next line will grab their attention.

"My mum is my dad's seventy-ninth wife. All the others are dead and buried in Europe, where my dad was born. According to my dad, all his wives died of natural causes, but I think he's probably lying. I think he bit them on the neck and drained every last ounce of..."

"Raymond!" Mrs Strathmore interrupts. "I'm sorry, class. I can see you're all enjoying Raymond's little joke here, but I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask him to stop this fanciful tale."

Just then Chelsea Steinberg speaks up. "I think Raymond is being creative," she says. "Maybe this man who adopted him really is a vampire. I think Raymond should finish his essay before you judge it."

This gets a resounding cheer from the rest of the class and I read on with renewed confidence.

"The only good thing I can say about my dad is that he's led a pretty interesting life. He came to America on the Mayflower and was imprisoned for being a coward during the Civil War. He claims to be 565 years old, but I think he's probably not a day over 550."

This cracks up the whole class, and even Mrs Strathmore manages a little smile.

"My mum, Lolita Munch, was born in Chicago. When she was 17, she ran away to California to be a film star, and that's where she met my dad. He was working on some low-budget horror film, and supposedly they fell in love."

"My dad, Vladimir Travis, originally Vladimir Travinsky, was born in 1431 in Romania, and was elected ruler of the southern part of the country in 1465. He lived in some weird castle, and his hobbies were stamp collecting and torturing people. He used to..."

"Raymond!" Mrs Strathmore snaps.

"OK, I admit I made up the part about him being a stamp collector."

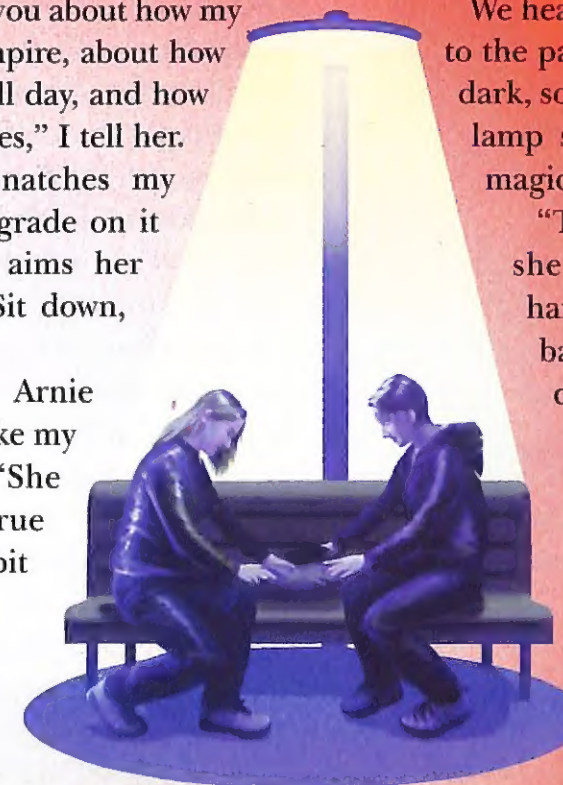
The class bursts out laughing and Mrs Strathmore looks like she's about to explode. "Take your seat this minute!" she bellows like a fire-breathing dragon.

"But I haven't told you about how my dad turned into a vampire, about how he sleeps in a coffin all day, and how he hijacks bloodmobiles," I tell her.

Mrs Strathmore snatches my essay, scribbles an F grade on it in red marker, and aims her finger at my desk. "Sit down, Travis!" she orders.

"That was great," Arnie Jones whispers as I take my seat behind him. "She wouldn't know true creative talent if it bit her on the nose."

"Yeah, if my dad bit her on the neck, she would believe me," I say, making Arnie just about split a gut laughing.



Later that day Chelsea and I come up with a scheme to get back at Mrs Strathmore. We meet that evening at the Magic Box in town, a little shop that has everything we need.

I picked out the fangs and claws that look the most realistic, then ask the manager if he's got anything to put over my eyes to make them look all creepy and gross.

He reaches under the counter. "These are called Dead Eyes," he tells me. "They're one size fits all."

"Fine. I'll take the eyes, the fangs, the claws, that black hooded cape on the model in the window, and your best bottle of fake blood." I grin at him. "To go, please."

We head out of the shop and over to the park. It's winter and already dark, so we sit down under a street lamp so Chelsea can begin her magical transformation on me.

"This is going to be fun!" she squeals, pulling out a handful of make-up from her bag. Then, like some kind of demented artist, she gets to work on my face. "Let's see, we'll start with a little white powder to give you that I-haven't-had-my-pint-today look."

She hands me a jar of gooey-looking stuff.

"Here, while I'm working on your face,

you rub this stuff in your hair. It'll turn it jet black."

Half an hour later, Chelsea sat back and smiled. "There. Now, pop on your eyes, fangs, and claws, and you're ready to scare the living daylights out of Mrs Strathmore," she said.

I did as I was told, then slipped on my black cape. I grin and a glob of saliva mixed with fake blood dribbles down my chin. The fake fangs in my mouth make me drool, which only adds to the effect I'm looking for.

Chelsea hands me a small mirror and I peer into the dead eyes and washed-out face of a vampire. "Wow, I look like a

corpse that hasn't slept in a thousand years," I gasp, staring at the dark bags she drew under my all-white eyes. "You're the best, Chelsea. And you've made my face look all lumpy, like there's worms and maggots crawling under my skin!"

Chelsea takes a bow then, together, we head for Mrs Strathmore's house.



Chelsea crouches behind the fence while I creep towards the kitchen window. As I get closer, I hear classical music, along with a chopping, crunching sound. Slowly, I peer over the ledge to see Mrs Strathmore cutting up carrots. I duck down just before she sees me and I wait there listening, my heart beating madly.

I look back towards the fence and wave Chelsea over.

She runs in a low crouch across the lawn. A second later she's beside me.

"She's in the kitchen," I whisper.

"Go for it," says Chelsea.

My heart thudding in my chest, I rise up in front of the window. Mrs Strathmore's eyes stand out on stalks, she screams blue murder, and for a second she looks like she's going to keel over and die right on the spot!

But she doesn't. Instead, her scared face turns into a really angry one. "Raymond Travis!" she bellows.

"Let's get out of here!" Chelsea whispers, frantically tugging at my arm.

"I'm right behind you!" I whisper back, scared out of my mind.

"I'll get you for this, young man!" Mrs Strathmore screams as she storms out of her front door. "And who's that with you?" she screeches into the night. "You won't get away with this, either!"

Chelsea and I don't stop running until we're three roads away when we're sure Mrs Strathmore isn't coming after us. Chelsea cleans off my make-up and stuffs my cape, claws, eyes and fangs into her bag. "I'm sorry she recognised you," she says. "I guess my make-up job wasn't that great after all."

"Don't worry, I'll just have to leave town forever!" I reply.



By the time I get home, Mrs Strathmore has already called my parents, and I know I'm in deep trouble. As you've probably already guessed, my parents aren't exactly the way I described them in my essay.

"What is wrong with you?" my mother screams, pacing around the room. "We look after you as though you're our own." She shakes her head in despair. "Vladimir. He's your son, maybe you should talk to him."

My father looms over me. "You always have to be the big joker, don't you?" he sneers.

"I'm sorry," I say, looking at my shoes.

"Sorry isn't good enough!" he bellows.

"OK, I'm very sorry!" I explode. "I'm sorry that you ever adopted me! I'm sorry that I'm alive!"

"Don't ever say that!" my father gasps. "Immortality is a wonderful thing!"

My father's face is paler than usual. He takes a few breaths and tries to calm himself. "Look, Raymond," he says, "all I ask of you is that you go to school, behave yourself, and try to act normally. Instead, you scare your teacher half to death. And then there's that ridiculous essay of yours..."

"Look, I didn't ask to be adopted," I interrupt. "Why don't you just take me back to the orphanage?"

"Because you're my son!" he bellows.

"I am not!" I cry hysterically. "I'd rather be dead than be your son!"

My mother steps up and puts her hand on my trembling shoulder. "Raymond,



honey, please. You don't know what you're saying." She looks at the monster of a man who just had the nerve to call me his son. "Vladimir, tell him."

My father looks at me with pain in his eyes. "Son, I..."

"Stop calling me that!" I scream. "You are not my father. Do you hear me?"

"He is your father," my mother says softly.

"B-but the papers you showed me from the orphanage... aren't they real?" I ask.

"Your father and I decided it was best to wait until you were thirteen to tell you," my mother says, her voice trembling. "That is when the effects begin to..."

"W-what effects?" I ask, not sure that I want to know.



My father, looking white as a sheet now, looks deep into my eyes. "Raymond, when I was a vampire in Romania, I had, as you know, many wives," he began. "None, including your mother here, were vampires like myself – except one. She, my seventy-eighth wife, was the granddaughter of Count Dracula himself, and I loved her very much. She gave birth to my only child, before she..."

Overcome with emotion, my father tries to go on. "She was killed... hunted down by a band of..."

He finally breaks down and weeps openly, and my mother puts her arms around him.

"Vladimir, it is too painful for you," my mother says softly. "I'll tell the story."

"No, no," my father says. "I'm fine. It is my story to tell." He clears his throat, and begins again. "Romania was a very dangerous place for vampires, Raymond, and sadly, my dear wife became a victim of those who hated us." He wipes away a stray tear. "Before she took her last breath, she

begged me to take you, our child, away from the madness there. She begged me to take you to America."



put my hands over my ears and start to back away from him, saying over and over again, "No way! No way! No way!"

"Yes, Raymond," my father says. "As it turns out, Count Dracula himself agreed that America was a safer place for you than Romania, and he sent several of his servants with me to America to help raise you." He smiles at my mother. "Luckily, I met your mother not long after I arrived from Romania. I was cast in a ridiculous horror film, and your mother was..."

I can see this man's – or should I say vampire's – lips moving, but my mind has crashed out. Now all I can hear is the blood rushing to my head. Feeling faint, I look

from Vladimir Travinsky back to my mother. I am speechless.

"Oh, sweetheart!" I hear my mother cry. "I know this is a lot for you to grasp all at once. But from the moment I laid eyes on you and your father, I fell in love with you both. It didn't matter to me what you were then, and it doesn't matter now!"

My head spinning, I try to make sense of everything. "So... what you're telling me is that I'm a..." I begin, but my mouth won't let me go on.

Both my mother and father nod. "You see, when we celebrated your thirteenth birthday two months ago, we knew we'd have to tell you soon," my father cuts in. "The effects should start to show themselves any day now."

"Effects?" I ask.

"You know, your eyeteeth should start growing," my father says nonchalantly. "You'll develop an overwhelming desire for..."

I hold up my hand to stop him. I'm not sure I can digest anymore before I swallow what has already been said. "OK," I say, trying to stay calm. "So you're telling me that I'm immortal, that I'm never going to die, and my great-grandfather is Count Dracula?"

My parents nod.

I think about this for a long moment, for a very long moment, and then I utter the only word that comes to mind: "Cool!"

THE END



OUR HAUNTED WORLD



SpineChiller checks out some ghostly goings-on in Czech Republic and Slovakia...



LAST REFUGE OF THE WOLF

Wolves are feared by most, particularly in parts of the world where werewolves were thought to be a reality! Because of this, wolves have long been wiped out from almost every forest in Europe. But the Bohemian Forest is one of the few areas left that is so dense and totally wild that hunters could not begin to track down all the beasts. It covers 81,000 hectares in total and lies on both sides of the border with Germany. Lynx live in the forest, too, but who knows what other unusual beasts may still lurk in its depths?

THE GUIDING LIGHT

In November 1977, a couple were climbing on Mount Snezka – the highest peak in Czech Republic – when it began to snow. Just as the couple realised they were dangerously lost, the woman saw a big ball of warm, blue light quite close to her. Scared at first, she watched as the ball seemed to move with her, then lead the way. Her husband couldn't see the ball, and told his wife she was taking the wrong path. But the woman carried on, with her husband reluctantly following up behind. For two hours, this helpful, mysterious light showed her the way. Only when the street lights of the town came into view did the light disappear and her husband finally believe that his wife had been guided by a mysterious force, that probably saved their lives!



RAIN OF TERROR

A weird day of poltergeist activity took place in Slovakia in 1927, and was reported by the local parish priest. Apparently, a young man and a 13-year-old boy had been fishing near the Tatra mountains when they were pelted with a shower of stones that only became visible when they were about 30cm away. When they took refuge in the local pub, the stones followed them there and the pair were thrown out! Back at the boy's home, not only did more stones seem to fall through the roof, but his father's collection of geological specimens also started to fly from room to room! Next morning, a lump of coal flew from the kitchen and broke a glass door panel. Later that day, while friends were sitting there, a deck of playing cards and money lifted up and started flying round! The poltergeist activity was definitely centred on the 13-year-old, but this is an unusual case, as the weird events stopped after just three days.

THE WALKING WIDOW

Often seen gliding through the endless corridors of Telc Castle (below), in South Moravia, is the ghost of Berta Rozmberk, the noblewoman forced to marry Count Liechtenstein centuries ago. After the count's death, Berta appeared wearing a white gown – looking more like a bride-in-waiting than a sad widow. Her dead husband never forgave her, it seems. When she died, he somehow tied her ghost to the scene of her unhappy marriage. The 'White Lady', as she is known, haunts the castle to this day.





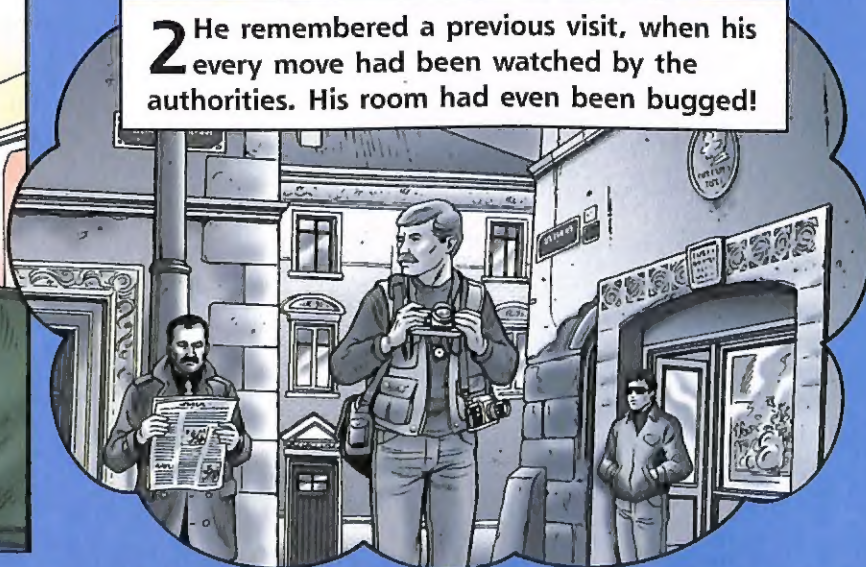
CUT-GLASS CLOT!

A friend of a friend's dad was asked to take photos in post-communist Prague...

1 He booked into a plush hotel and unpacked his things. His first floor room was nicely decorated.



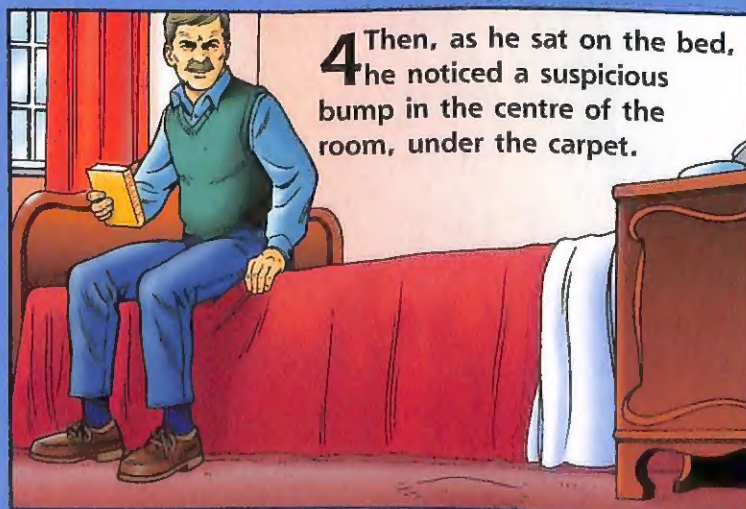
2 He remembered a previous visit, when his every move had been watched by the authorities. His room had even been bugged!



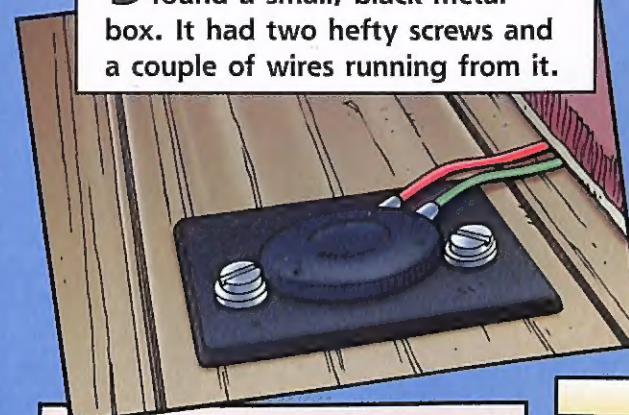
3 Old habits die hard, so he scoured his room for bugging devices – but found nothing.



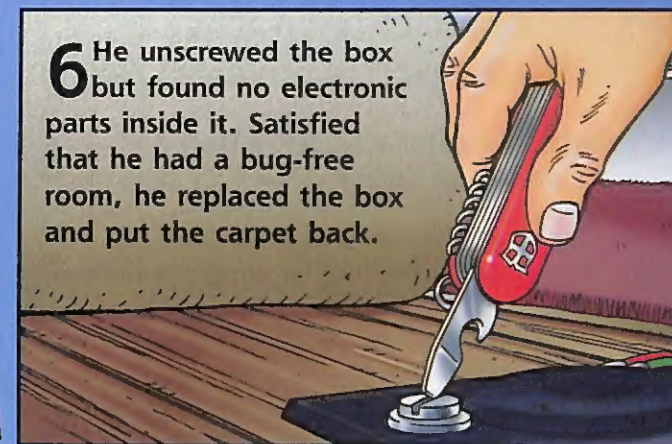
4 Then, as he sat on the bed, he noticed a suspicious bump in the centre of the room, under the carpet.



5 He lifted up the carpet and found a small, black metal box. It had two hefty screws and a couple of wires running from it.



6 He unscrewed the box but found no electronic parts inside it. Satisfied that he had a bug-free room, he replaced the box and put the carpet back.



7 Feeling peckish, he rang room service – only to be told that it had been suspended as the result of an emergency.



8 He went to the lobby on the floor below, where scenes of chaos greeted him. The restaurant was cordoned off, and several people were being treated for shock.



9 Apparently, a party of diners had narrowly escaped death when an enormous, cut-glass chandelier fell from the ceiling and smashed next to their table!



DREAMTIME

Special Investigation File: 51

Subject: the creation beliefs and stories of the Aboriginal peoples
Place: Australia

SpineChiller creates a file

Evidence no: 51/2
An Aboriginal rock painting showing a Dreamtime story



January 1998

Dear Rebecca
We're having a great holiday in Australia.
As you're fascinated by Aboriginal culture, I thought I'd tell you a Dreamtime story I heard in the southeastern state of New South Wales.
The Aboriginal people who live around Narran Lake in that region believe the world was made by two crocodile spirits. But when the spirits ate the wives of a local hunter, the hunter killed them. As they writhed around dying, they made a great hollow in the earth — this filled with water and became Narran Lake.
See you soon.
Rachel

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

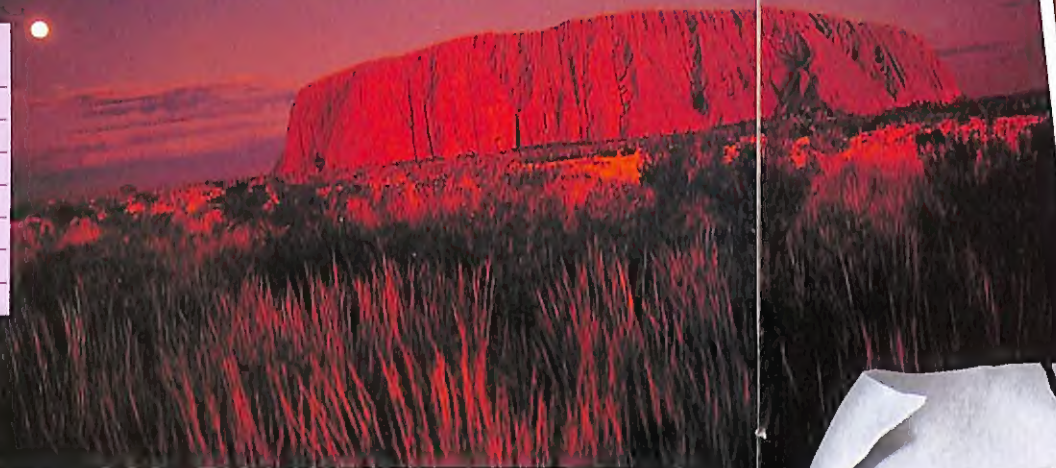
During the last Ice Age, the world's seas were much lower than they are now, so more land rose above the water. As a result, there were many islands between Southeast Asia and Australia, and it was possible to journey from one to the next by canoe or raft. This is how experts believe that the first people arrived in Australia, about 50,000 years ago.

But these first people — the Aborigines — tell very different tales about their origins. They believe in an ancient era called the Dreamtime, or Dreaming, when spirits created the Earth. Each Aboriginal tribe has its own Dreamtime stories that relate to the natural features in the local environment. The stories are passed on in words and remembered in song and dance rituals called corroborees. They are also depicted in thousands of rock engravings and cave paintings.



Evidence no: 51/3
Aboriginal costumes and body decoration for a corroboree

Evidence no: 51/1
Uluru at sunset



EXPLORING THE OLGAS

Our reporter comes face to face with some rocky Australian giants!

Uluru National Park is home to the mighty rock called Uluru. But it also houses another amazing rock collection — the Olgas. Experts think that, in the distant past, the Olgas' 30 or more domes may have been a single rock even bigger than Uluru. But over thousands of years, wind and rain split its surface.

The rocks are known as the Olgas because explorer Ernest Giles named the largest, Mount Olga, after a Russian noblewoman. Their Aboriginal name is Kata Tjuta, meaning 'many heads'. Some of the rocks are said to represent giants — Pungalunga Men — who ate Aborigines during the Dreamtime era.

CONCLUSION

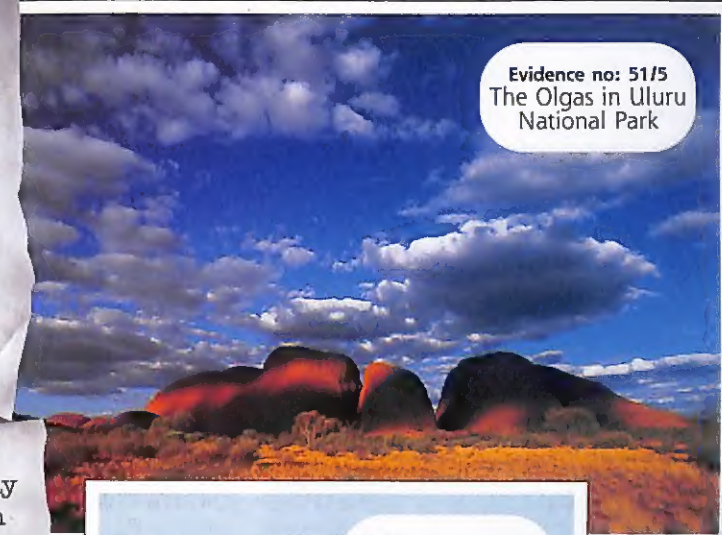
Australia is a fascinating continent, full of amazing natural features that tourists love to visit. But to the Aborigines, its rocks, lakes and deserts tell of the Dreamtime, when spirits walked the Earth. The Aborigines believe that these spirits are not dead, but still live under the ground or high above in the sky. There they watch over the many places and people that they created long, long ago.

ROCK REPORT

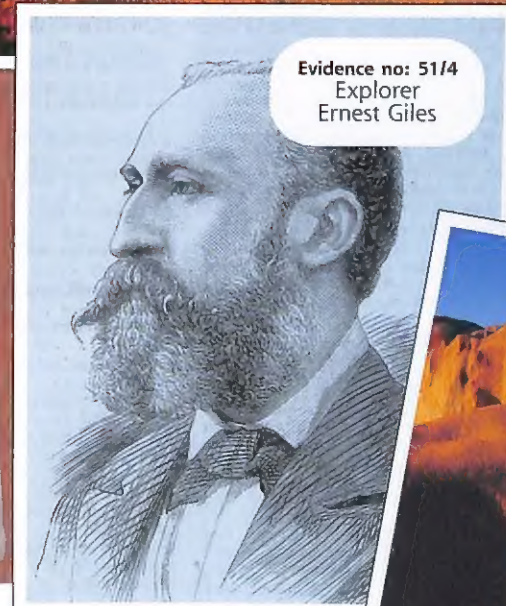
As requested, I have investigated the giant sandstone rock that stands in the centre of Australia. Here are my findings:

- 1 The first European to see the rock was Ernest Giles, in 1872. A year later, William Gosse climbed the mound and named it 'Ayers Rock' after Sir Henry Ayers, Chief Secretary of South Australia. Now the rock is officially known by its Aboriginal name, Uluru.
- 2 Uluru is the largest single rock in the world. It is 348m high, 3.6km long and measures 8.8km around its base. Geologists believe that it may also continue 6km down under the ground.
- 3 Aborigines have lived around the rock for at least 10,000 years. It is now owned by the local Luritja and Pitjantjatjara tribes, but all Aborigines consider it the most sacred site in Australia.
- 4 Many Uluru caves are covered in ancient Aboriginal paintings of Dreamtime episodes. Non-Aborigines are asked to respect Aboriginal beliefs by keeping away from the sacred images.

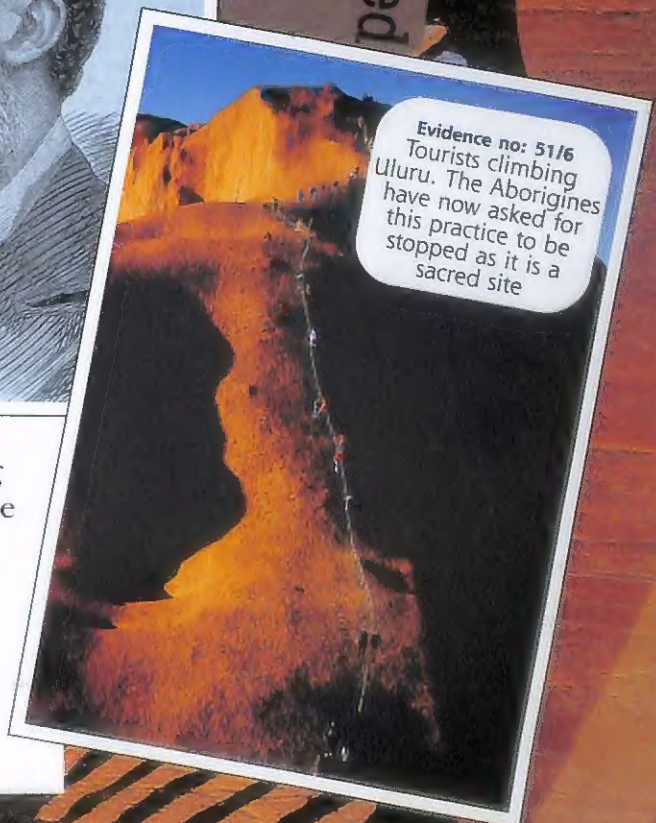
Evidence no: 51/5
The Olgas in Uluru National Park



Evidence no: 51/4
Explorer Ernest Giles



Evidence no: 51/6
Tourists climbing Uluru. The Aborigines have now asked for this practice to be stopped as it is a sacred site



Unexplained

CLASSIC



SERIAL

Chapter 3

A Christmas Carol

Retold from a story by Charles Dickens

Scrooge fell to his knees at the sight of the next ghost. The phantom in front of him was completely covered in a black cloak. Its power and mystery terrified him.

"You are the Ghost of Christmas To Come?" Scrooge eventually asked the spirit, but it remained silent. Filled with dread, Scrooge followed the phantom as it moved about the city. First, the two of them stopped to listen to some businessmen that

Scrooge recognised. They were mocking a colleague who had recently died. Then the miser and the phantom arrived in the filthy city slums.

With the stench of decay all around, Scrooge and the phantom stood in a tiny hovel and watched a wizened old man buy items from three poor tradespeople. Scrooge realised that the three were selling clothing and possessions that they had taken from a dead man's house.

"If he wanted to keep 'em after he was dead, the wicked old crow," said one of them, "why wasn't he decent in his lifetime? Then he'd have had somebody to look after him when he died, instead of gasping his last alone."

The others agreed heartily, clutching the money that they had made.

"He frightened everyone away while he was alive, but has managed to profit us now he's dead! Ha, ha, ha!" laughed another of the tradespeople.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot, "I see the case of this unhappy man is not unlike mine. Merciful Heaven, what is this?"

Scrooge sprang back in terror at a new scene that appeared before him. There, a motionless figure wrapped



in a shroud lay on a bed, beneath a grimy, ragged sheet. Unwatched and uncared for, it was the dead man whose belongings were being sold.

The phantom pointed at the thin sheet. Scrooge could easily have removed it to see who the dead person was, but fear prevented him. He looked around. The house was not quite empty – rats were watching the corpse. Scrooge felt sick as he heard them gnawing nearby. What did they want in this room of death? He did not dare to think.

"Spirit, please let us leave this fearful place. If there is any man in this city who feels emotion as a result of this man's death, show me, I beg you."

The phantom spread its dark robe before Scrooge, then pulled it back to reveal a room where a woman and man were in conversation.

"He is dead," said the man.

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed the woman and placed her head in her hands.

Scrooge felt a tinge of relief. Someone

cared for this man at least. The woman kept her head bowed and her hands locked in prayer. But when she looked up again, she was wearing a broad smile and tears of happiness were streaming down her flushed cheeks.

"We are saved from him! Whoever arranges our debts in the future could never be as heartless as he was."

"Yes, my darling, we are saved! Hurrah!"

Aghast, Scrooge turned to the phantom.

"Please let me see some tenderness connected with a death, any death at all," he pleaded.

At this request, the ghost led Scrooge through several streets that were familiar to him. As they went along, the old miser looked here and there, hoping to catch a glimpse of himself. But he was nowhere to be seen. Then they entered Bob Cratchit's house and found Mrs Cratchit and the children seated round the fire. Everyone was very quiet.

"Your father is late," Mrs Cratchit said, her voice barely a whisper.

"He has walked slower these last few evenings, Mother," the eldest son replied softly.

The family remained silent until the door opened gently and in walked Bob Cratchit. How ill, how sad he looked. He tried to be sweet to his wife and children, but grief scarred his face. His children bustled around him attentively. His wife handed him some tea. He cradled it in his hands for a moment before breaking down.

"My little, little child!" cried Bob, over and over again.

Through his sobs, Bob Cratchit made every member of his family promise never to forget the dead Tiny Tim. Good, sweet Tiny Tim. Scrooge watched in dismay. He could not remember his heart ever feeling heavier than it did at this moment.

Underlined words are explained in WORD POWER.

The ghost dragged Scrooge away from the grieving family and took him through the streets into a churchyard. It was an eerie place, overrun with grass and other plants. The ghost stood among the graves and pointed down to one of them. Scrooge advanced towards it, trembling. In his heart he knew that the grave belonged to the man they had seen lying dead and unloved.

"Phantom, will the events you have shown me happen no matter what, or can any be changed?" Scrooge asked. But the ghost remained silent. Then Scrooge bent down and read the gravestone. On it was his own name.

"No, Spirit, NO!" Scrooge screamed, gripping the phantom's robe.

The phantom started to shrink and change shape.

"Help me Spirit. I am not the man I was before. I have changed. I WILL change. Don't leave me here! Speak to me," Scrooge pleaded.

Scrooge looked around him. The phantom had vanished and so had the graveyard. He was alive and back in his bedroom. He still had a chance to do something about all that he had seen.

"I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" Scrooge cried. "Oh, Jacob Marley! Praise be for this!"

Scrooge started skipping around his bedroom and burst into laughter. His chuckle was impressive for a man who had not laughed for many years.

"I don't know what day of the month it is! I am as light as a feather and as happy as an angel."

WORD POWER

stench – a terrible smell

wizened – shrivelled; heavily wrinkled

shroud – a sheet in which a corpse is wrapped for burial

aghast – horrified; appalled

Hearing the deafening peals of the church bells, Scrooge flung open the window and craned his head out. He spied a small boy below.

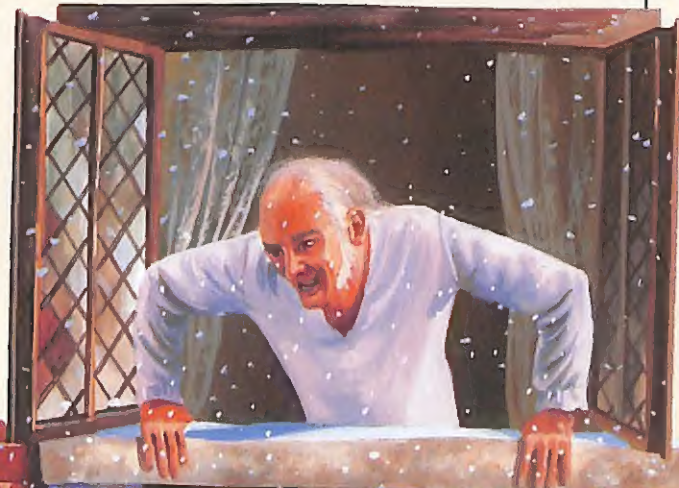
"What's today, my fine fellow?" cried Scrooge.

"Today?" replied the boy. "Why, Christmas Day, of course."

"Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven't missed it. The spirits have done it all in one night."

Scrooge asked the boy to buy the enormous prize turkey in the butcher's window for him. He also promised to pay the boy a shilling when he returned with it.

"An intelligent boy, a delightful boy!" Scrooge exclaimed. "I'll send the turkey to Bob Cratchit!" he added, rubbing his hands with pleasure. "He won't know who's sent it. What a splendid surprise!"



Next, Scrooge shaved, dressed and went out into the busy streets. He regarded everyone with a delighted smile and seemed so full of Christmas cheer that three or four strangers bid him "Merry Christmas". Scrooge had never heard such sweet words ringing in his ears before.

He had not walked far when he spotted one of the gentlemen who had visited the day before.

"My dear Sirs," said Scrooge, greeting the gentlemen. "Please forgive me for my manners. May I now offer a donation of..." and he whispered a figure into one gentleman's ear. The gentleman sprang back in amazement at his words.

"Lord bless me! That's an awfully large sum of money, Mr Scrooge. I don't know what to say to such generosity."

"Don't say a word. I think I owe a great many back payments. A Merry Christmas to you!"

"And to you, Sir!"

Scrooge went to church, then walked about the streets watching people with great pleasure. It was as if he had never seen these people before, which in a way was true. In the afternoon he paced in front of his nephew's house a dozen times before he had the courage to enter.

"Bless my soul!" cried Scrooge's nephew. "Am I seeing a ghost?"

"No, it is I, your uncle Ebenezer. Is there room at your table for a foolish old man, my dear nephew?"

Scrooge's nephew was delighted to welcome him. So were his niece and all the other guests. Scrooge had the most wonderful time, eating dinner, then playing parlour games late into the evening. What happiness!

The next morning, Scrooge rushed into his office to get there before Bob Cratchit. When Bob entered late, Scrooge put on his best angry face and told his clerk that this would not do.

"I'm so sorry Mr Scrooge, Sir," poor Bob said to his employer.

"I won't stand for this sort of thing any longer, you hear," Scrooge replied angrily.

Poor Bob trembled.

"So I'll be raising your salary. But before we discuss the matter further, rush out and buy a sack of coal. We want the biggest fire in any office in this city. A Merry Christmas, Bob!"

Scrooge was better than his word. He doubled Bob's salary and became a second father to Tiny Tim, who lived long and well. He became as good a man as the city had ever known. He never saw another ghost and always kept Christmas well. May that be said of all of us. And as Tiny Tim said, "God Bless Us, Every One!"

THE END

NEXT ISSUE:
Dracula by Bram Stoker



LITTLE FOLK

Little folk or fairies are tiny enchanted beings who live in magical woodland kingdoms – places most of us will never get to see.

FAIRY FANTASY

Fairies come in all shapes and sizes. The best-loved are the tiny creatures with transparent wings surrounded by a bright light. They are mostly helpful, casting good spells and sprinkling stardust all around. Pixies and elves come with and without wings, but tend to share a love of mischief. The gruesome goblin, however, can be downright troublesome.

Goblins and certain bad-news elves dislike humans and thrive on playing tricks and making their lives miserable. They may be satisfied with turning milk sour, but

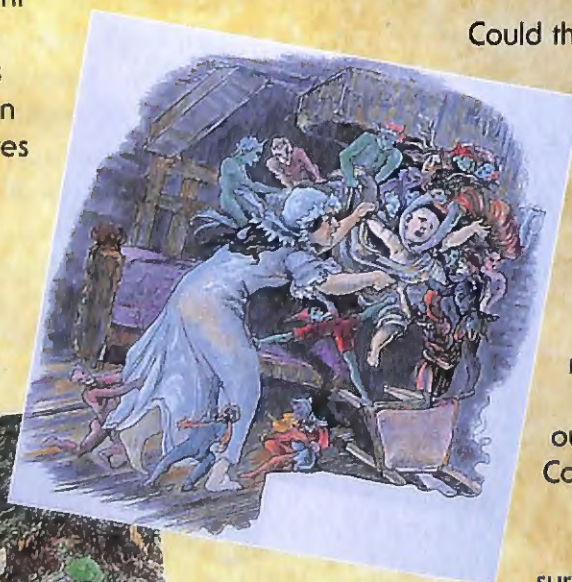
► BATTLE OF THE BABY

If the little folk take your baby, you'll probably get a grisly goblin in its place!



▲ PARTY TIME

If you find a circle of grass that is greener than all the rest, you may have stumbled across a fairy ring, where fairies sing and dance.



◀ DARE TO DANCE

This man is saved by his friend from a lifetime of dancing in the fairy ring.

at worst, take delight in stealing human babies and replacing them with their own. The goblin baby then grows up grumbling and naughty, much to the puzzlement of its foster parents!

MYTH OR MEMORY

Belief in fairies or little folk is worldwide. In Ireland, leprechauns are shoemaker-elves who bury their gold at the end of rainbows! Although no one has ever found the gold, could there be any truth in the fairies' existence?

Could these little folk spring from a distant memory of an actual race of people?

In Irish tradition the fairies came from over the seas. They took over Ireland with their magical skills and immense bravery, but gradually retired to live underground, occasionally coming out to help or cause trouble. Could this be a description of an ancient tribe that hid underground in order to survive but occasionally came out to fight back?

Strangely, in the 1920s, a storm in the Orkneys, in Scotland, revealed a hidden village, buried since Bronze Age times. The tiny rooms suggested that a pygmy-type

people once lived there and the village had been deliberately hidden beneath a domed roof. Could this have been the home of a long-lost tribe of little folk?

MINI MOTORS

But surely no one today really believes in little people? Well, it was not so long ago that a serious report was made by a group of 10-year-old children who claimed to have seen up to 60 gnomes driving around Wollaton Park in Nottingham in tiny red and white bubble cars.



▲ WOODLAND LITTLE FOLK

Gnomes, elves, pixies and other little folk march through their woodland home.



▲ TWO-FACED TYPE

A Little Man of the French countryside complains to a farmer who has ploughed up his home.

The children stuck to their story under quite severe questioning. In fact, an official at the Fairy Investigation Society claimed that the children were by no means the only people to report sightings of little people in Wollaton Park.

FLYING ALIENS

In 1979, a woman from Birmingham claimed to have been visited by aliens from outer space. But in almost every way the creatures she described resembled fairies. They were about a metre in height, had wings and flew, and were surrounded by light.

However they also had pointed feet, hands and heads, making them sound like a lot of other descriptions of alien 'greys' – visitors from outer space. When they left, she claimed they were travelling in a glowing, orange-coloured 'spaceship'.

UNIDENTIFIED FOLK

Is there a link between fairies and aliens? Or is it just a coincidence that as scientific knowledge has increased, fairy sightings have declined, while UFO sightings have surged?

▼ FAIRY-TALE OR SCI-FI?

Is this man being visited by an alien or a goblin? Who knows?





CRISTY GODS PUZZLES

LOST AND FOUND

The lava from this mountain is carrying many objects the gods thought they had lost. Can you work out which belongs to Cupid, god of love, Neptune, god of the sea, Thor, god of thunder, Mercury, the messenger god, Aphrodite, goddess of beauty and Pandora, the first woman in the world who was given many gifts?

TAKE THAT!

Gods and goddesses Jupiter, Zeus, Thor, Diana, Athene and Apollo are hurling thunderbolts at each other. On each airborne thunderbolt is an anagram of the god or goddess who threw it. Can you sort them out?

IDAN

EEHNTA

ROTH

SEUZ

ILLOORA

PIRJETU

CIRCLE OF HONOUR

All the symbols in the stone circle below are associated with a Greek god. Can you guess which?

The letter P

Horns

Pipes

Reeds

Goat's legs

Tree

GRID GODS!

Can you fit the names of the gods and goddesses listed here into the grid? Some letters have been put in for you.



ATHENE HERA

JUNO PAN

RHIANNON VESTA

CERES HORTA

JUPITER PLUTO

SATURN ZEUS

CUPID JOVE

MINERVA POSEIDON

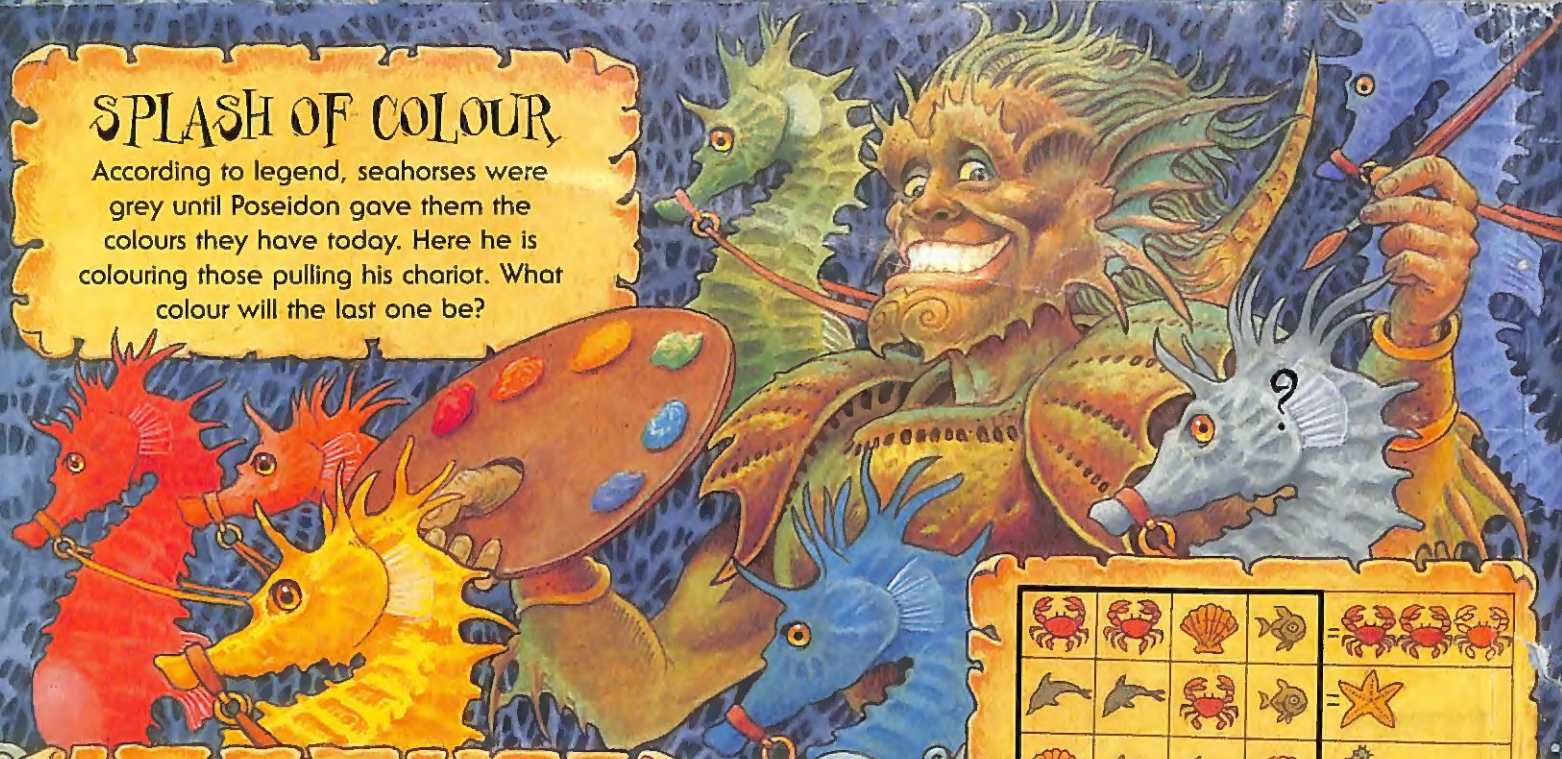
SET

FANTASTIC FACTS

Some tribal cultures once thought the nasal passages were pathways for the soul. When a person was sick, his or her nose would be blocked up to stop the soul leaving. In Celebes (now Sulawesi), a person who was ill would have fish-hooks attached to each nostril to catch his soul if it tried to escape.



















According to legend, seahorses were grey until Poseidon gave them the colours they have today. Here he is colouring those pulling his chariot. What colour will the last one be?



Kraken has one more line to total up before he knows the next turn of the safe's wheel – the one that'll lead him to Neptune's buried treasure.

Can you help Kraken crack the code?

				=			
				=			
				=			
				=			

Here's a clue:
Each symbol
represents a
number:

shell = 1
fish = 2
crab = 3
dolphin = 4



ANSWERS

ZEUS TAKE THAT! (From left to right, top to bottom)
CIRCLE OF HONOUR: Pan, the god of fields, woods, shepherds and flocks. He had the upper body of a man and the legs of a goat and made Pan pipes from reeds.
LOST AND FOUND: midcent (three-pronged spear to divide the sea) - Neptune: golden apple (won in a beauty contest) - Aphrodite: hammer - Thor: bow and arrow - Cupid (Eros): winged sandals - Mercury: box (all the evils of the world flew out of the box except hope) - Pandora.
SPASH OF COLOUR: The last seahorse will be violet, Poseidon has coloured each of them in one colour of the rainbow.
CAN KRAKEN CRACK IT? The seahorse, which equals 10, will open the chest because: shell (1) + crab (3) + dolphin (4) + fish (2) = seahorse (10). A storkfish = 13.

[illegible]